

# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: March 26, 2007

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 11: Presentation and discussion of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's previously adopted Evaluation Criteria for Land Acquisition and Park Development and Improvements projects, and review of Workprogram.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy hear a presentation on the past development of the Evaluation Criteria and Workprogram; and discuss potential additions to the Workprogram and new public involvement.

Legislative Authority: Section 33208 (a) (2) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy developed Land Acquisition and Park Improvement and Development project evaluation criteria in 2000 and 2001, which were used to evaluate projects nominated for the Conservancy's Workprogram 2000. The evaluation criteria continue to serve as an objective tool to enhance a science- and information-based guide for the Conservancy in weighing potential projects nominated for funding. Named values, with approximately 100 numerically scored sub-criteria, include Wildlife Resource, Floristic Resource, Scenic Resource, Trail Resource, Other Recreational Resource, Archaeological or Historic Resource, Urban Resource, Watershed Resource, Access, Partnership, and Economic Opportunity. Project types are spread over a wide geographic area of Southern California, including urban natural parks, river restoration projects, wildlands, and partnership projects; hence a broad set of criteria are used to assist decision-making.

In late 1999 and early 2000, the Conservancy embarked on an ambitious information-gathering campaign and a series of public workshops in order to solicit project nominations for land acquisitions and park improvement and restoration projects, resulting in a large list of potential projects. Using Evaluation Criteria described above, numeric scores were assigned to the hundreds of nominated projects. However, scores were intended only as a guide to group high, medium, and lower priority projects, as land acquisition and improvement for public access is a sensitive policy matter for the Conservancy Board that cannot be successfully accomplished by the mechanical application of a strict formula. The overall deciding criterion has been one of economic efficiency. That is, in the cases of roughly equal projects, a deciding criterion has been the degree to which Conservancy funds stimulate outside participation (matching funds), whether from private parties (such as landowners or trusts or individuals)

or other government agencies.

Staff and the public continue to identify projects to add to the Workprogram, and the Conservancy has periodically added new projects (see attached list). New initiatives such as the Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan, the Resources Agency's River Parkways program, Proposition 50 Integrated Resources Watershed Management Plans, the "Common Ground" plan for the Los Angeles River and San Gabriel River Watersheds, and now Proposition 84 have created a framework for expanding project opportunities.

Conservancy and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) staff are frequently contacted by members of the public as well as partner agencies about new projects, and the staffs monitor and track such opportunities. Several times a year, competitive grant funds become available (such as from Los Angeles County Proposition A; Resources Agency River Parkway grants; etc.) and grant applications for both new and existing projects are submitted with approval of the appropriate agency, either the Conservancy or MRCA Governing Board. The competitive programs tend to have staggered deadlines, and as a result staff are continually evaluating opportunities for land acquisition and improvement projects. Potential projects are evaluated with respect to environmental justice, social equity, and community support issues in addition to all other Evaluation Criteria, and depending on the competitive grant program requirements. Staff members participate in a number of long-range planning groups and task forces, and as part of those processes receive and submit new project ideas. Some of these planning groups include the Los Angeles River Master Plan Advisory Committee, Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force, Council of Arroyo Seco Agencies, Integrated Resource Watershed Management Plan (IRWMP) committees for the Los Angeles River, North Santa Monica Bay, and Santa Clara River; Calleguas Creek Steering Committee; Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council; Missing Linkages team; and others.

A hallmark flexibility has been built into the Conservancy's Workprogram to allow for its evolution and expansion. For example, the 588-acre Soka University/King Gillette Ranch, coveted by park agencies for thirty years, was *not* included in the 2000 Workprogram: its acquisition was deemed out of reach as the land had been the subject of a land use legal settlement and other litigation. Then in early 2004, the previously-unwilling sellers unexpectedly offered the property for a park purchase. The Conservancy was able to quickly add the property to the Workprogram and to the County's Proposition A Workprogram. Application of the Evaluation Criteria would have ranked King Gillette Ranch as highest of all possible projects even without the funding partnerships that more than matched the Conservancy's grants of \$10 million in Proposition 40 and 50 grant funds. The remaining \$25 came from nine other agencies and private donors million to complete the \$35 million purchase price.

Likewise, the innovative Vista Hermosa Park Urban/River watershed project was another post-

initial Workprogram addition to the Park Improvements and Development Workprogram of 2001. The multi-million dollar partnership with Los Angeles Unified School District to create an urban natural park and watershed education site, with active recreation and a soccer field, is currently under construction and planned for opening by early 2008.

On a smaller scale, a \$500,000 Prop 50 grant in 2006 to the City of Thousand Oaks was more than matched by \$1,765,000 in City and Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency funds, enabling the City to purchase and preserve a key 18-acre wildlife corridor linkage on Mountclef Ridge.

The Conservancy may wish to consider for future action adding additional River and Urban Projects to the Workprogram. One or more public workshops could be held to get community input, and correlate and incorporate new project opportunity information that continues to arise from sources already cited, and notably from Project Planning and Design work by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority staff, funded by Conservancy grants.

A substantial number of the initial 2000/2001 projects have been accomplished or are in process. The following projects were added by the Conservancy to the Workprogram since initial adoption:

**Land Acquisition Projects:**

3-24-03, Agenda Item 9d: Calabasas Highlands Adjacent; expanded boundary of original designation.

4-28-03, Agenda Item 15: Verdugo Mountains-Big Tujunga Wash Wildlife Corridor additions.

7-28-03, Agenda Item 19: Newhall Pass Wildlife Corridor-West of I-5 project, to add additional East Canyon and Leaming Canyon land between Santa Clarita Woodlands Park and The Old Road (includes the Rex Holland property).

11-24-03, Agenda Item 14: San Gabriel and Sierra Pelona Mountains Connector.

4-26-04, Agenda Item 12: (a) Chalk Hills and Cerrillos Plateau in Woodland Hills; (b) Coldwater Canyon Wildlife Corridor and Wilacre Park Additions; (c) Stone Canyon Reservoir Adjacent, Beverly Glen; (d) Griffith Park-Cahuenga Peak, Hollywood; (e) Eastern San Rafael Mountains, Pasadena; (f) Montclef Ridge Additions, Thousand Oaks, and Lindero Canyon North, Agoura Hills.

6-14-04, Agenda Item 11: King Gillette Ranch (Soka University), Calabasas area.

8-30-04, Agenda Item 10a: Soledad Canyon to Upper Santa Clara River Habitat Linkage; Topanga Canyon-Kerry Lane; and Topanga Canyon-Garapito Canyon-Hillside Drive.

4-4-05, Agenda Item 18: Arroyo Conejo-Rockwell, Thousand Oaks; Las Lajas Creek Channel Daylighting and Restoration, Simi Valley; Arroyo Simi Industrial Park Restoration, Simi Valley; Moorpark-Hidden Creek, Lower, Moorpark; 118-Freeway-Los Angeles Avenue Connector, Moorpark; Browns Canyon-118 Freeway South, Chatsworth; Plummer-Variel Restoration; Plummer-Topanga (SR 27) Restoration, Chatsworth; Dry Canyon Creek-101 Freeway Restoration, Calabasas; Aliso Wash-Los Angeles River Confluence Restoration; Calabasas Creek-Fallbrook Restoration, Woodland Hills; Canoga Avenue-MTA Right of Way; Bell Creek-Lederer Ranch, Woodland Hills; Fryman Canyon-8701-8715 Mulholland; Vista Hermosa Park Restoration, Los Angeles; and Pacoima Wash Greenway.

10-24-05, Agenda Item 17: Bell Creek River Corridor acquisition.

1-23-06, Agenda Item 18: Pickens Ridge- Angeles Forest Connector; Soledad-Canyon Angeles Forest West Connector; Topanga Canyon Summit Valley Ed Edelman Park North Addition; Stokes-Canyon King Gillette Connector; Summit Valley-Topanga State Park West Connector; Santa Clara River-Chiquito Canyon Val Verde Open Space, and Deer Lake Highlands lower addition.

3-27-06, Agenda Item 16: Stokes Canyon-King Gillette Connector; Liberty Canyon Wildlife Corridor North; and Upper Las Virgenes Open Space Preserve-Northeast Connector.

2-27-07, Agenda Item 8c: Sage Ranch Park Additions Amendment; and Cold Creek-Red Rock Connector.

**Park Improvements Workprogram Additions:**

12-16-02, Agenda Item 10: Reyes Adobe restoration

4-4-05, Agenda Item 19: Conejo Creek-North Fork Wildflower Park Dechannelization; Las Lajas Creek Channel Daylighting and Restoration; Arroyo Simi Industrial Park Restoration; Aliso-Limekiln Creek Restoration; Plummer-Variel Restoration; Plummer-Topanga (SR 27) Restoration; Dry Canyon Creek-101 Freeway Restoration; Aliso Wash-Los Angeles River Confluence Restoration; Calabasas Creek-Fallbrook Restoration; Canoga Avenue-MTA Right of Way; Bell Creek-Lederer Ranch, Woodland Hills; Fryman Canyon-8701-8715 Mulholland; Vista Hermosa Park Restoration, Los Angeles; and Pacoima Wash Greenway.

10-24-05, Agenda Item 17: Bell Creek River Corridor improvements.

